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HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND LIFE.

From the Boston Lectures for 1870.

BY

REV. NOAH PORTER, D.D.,
PROFESSOR IN YALE COLLEGE, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

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X.

THE ARGUMENT FOR CHRISTIANITY, COMPLEX AND CUMULATIVE.

BY REV. NOAH PORTER, D.D., PROF. YALE COLLEGE, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

CHRISTIANITY, as we find it in the New Testament, claims to be superhuman and supernatural. The argument which we submit in support of this claim is founded on three prominent features; viz., Christianity as a history, Christianity as truth, and Christianity as a life. In presenting this argument, we propose, in the first place, to describe each of these features of Christianity as it is presented to us in the New Testament. Secondly, we shall ask how far these features prove Christianity to be supernatural when considered apart, and when considered jointly in their mutual dependence and cumulative strength. Thirdly, we shall inquire how far this evidence has been weakened or set aside by the assailants of Christianity. Each of the three divisions of our argument will be divided into three subordinate heads.

I. We inquire what Christianity is in the three features named, as history, as truth, and as life. And, —

1. What is Christianity as history?

Christianity begins as a history, — the history of the

most extraordinary man, by common consent, in character, career, and influence, who ever lived upon the earth, or influenced the course of human affairs. He appears at first as a teacher and reformer. He gathers disciples, impressing himself by some uncommon fascination, wherever he goes, upon one and another whom he attaches to his person and his cause, in spite of the severity of the service and the frankness with which he explains it. He speaks, to the public, doctrines that are strange for their searching character, and almost revolutionary for their boldness, but always with the air of authority, — as one divinely commissioned to proclaim the truth, and exact obedience. His deeds attract attention and enforce awe at the mysterious power which lay in his hand and his voice. At his touch, the springs of life were renewed; at his voice, the maiden awaked from a sleep which was death; the young man was given to his mother when borne upon his bier to the tomb; and Lazarus broke forth from the tomb itself. He uttered mysterious words respecting his person, his origin, his future destiny, and the triumph of his kingdom, — words which, as they grew more explicit, were more and more perplexing for their marvellous import and their astounding audacity, — words at which his most confiding followers were more and more amazed, though they believed he could not deceive them; while his bitterest enemies were more exasperated, though they could not satisfy even themselves that "he had a devil, or was mad." Once or twice, extraordinary manifestations were made to a select number of his most trusted friends of something as yet unexplained in his person, which over-

whelmed them with amazement, and exalted them with reverent delight.

As we follow this new historic force to the death of its Author, it is all gathered within the person and the life of this one Being; all its energy, and capacity to endure, are in him; all its power to gain or hold the convictions or the confidence of others is his personal force. He dies in shame and agony: he is buried; and in his tomb are buried with him the hopes of those who had looked for his coming and kingdom. It is their bruised and bleeding love, it is their weeping fidelity alone, that causes them to linger around the grave in which their loving Friend and Teacher now lies, and with whom the cause seems buried, — the lost cause, to which he sacrificed his life. Their hearts composed his epitaph: "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel."

But he lives again: he remains alive some forty days, and is then removed forever from the earth. But first he bequeaths to his followers the simple duty of proclaiming the history of his life: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." At the first recorded assembly of those who received this trust, they show that they are mindful of it by taking measures to give it effect: "Wherefore, of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

Christianity thenceforward was propagated as history. At the bold proclamation of this completed

life, the cause, that was apparently lost, gains as it never had gained before. In the story of the dead Christ who had risen, there was power to shake the nations. When its adherents were commanded, on peril of their lives, not to teach in the name of Jesus, they made the simple reply, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." A new adherent also appears among the boldest advocates of the cause which he had persecuted, — not convinced, indeed, by the testimony of the other witnesses, but by the direct manifestation of the Master himself, from whom he received, not only his commission to teach, but the matter of the gospel which he was to proclaim. But Paul, like the rest, propagated Christianity as a history, telling the one story of the facts of Christ's life, superadding and emphasizing Christ's appearance and communications to himself. In his writings, largely doctrinal as they are, the well-known history is repeatedly assumed and affirmed to be true. The gospel of God, to which he is set apart as an apostle, is the history "concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." Towards the end of his life, he enjoins upon Timothy to remember, as if this was all he needed to recollect, "that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my gospel." Some years later, another advocate of the cause speaks to certain disciples "of the things which are reported to you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;" asserting, "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables

when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty; for he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount."

Christianity was accepted and believed as a true history. One of the most conspicuous instances, as well as the most detailed, of the acceptance of this history, is that of Paul, whose own account of the way, and the reasons why, he was led to believe it, is recorded in his letters, — a collection of writings which is as well attested and as undisputed as are the letters of Cicero. No critic doubts that they were written by him, and within some thirty years of the death of Christ. In some three or four years after this event, Paul himself, as we learn from his own statement, received this history as true, and superadded to it a history of what had befallen himself; and forthwith he began to give his personal testimony to what he had known, and to what he believed, concerning it. Whether or not we receive Luke's history in the Acts of the Apostles as written in the first century, or not, no one ventures to deny, that, all through the last two-thirds of it, the history which Paul believed and proclaimed was received by multitudes of men. In some forty or fifty years after the death of Christ, the fact is noticed and recorded by secular historians (as Tacitus and Pliny), that a great body of believers in the story had spread themselves through the Roman Empire. All

the means of information which we possess warrant the conclusion, that Christianity was received by every one of these persons as a true history; and that every man who accepted baptism, gave his testimony, by this act, that he believed the story to be true.

The history proclaimed and accepted was, very largely, *a history of supernatural events.* We need not at present scrutinize the terms "supernatural" and "miraculous." All that we affirm is, that the very kernel and interest of this history, as well as its attractiveness and force, lay in what was believed to have been wrought by divine power, and to have been incapable of being effected by any inferior agent or agency, whether of knowledge or skill. This was what Paul believed; this was what Paul's disciples were taught in Thessalonica and Corinth, in the provinces of Galatia, and in Rome,—all within some sixteen or twenty years after the Christian story was complete. That all this was believed is what Pliny and Tacitus confirm. This is what no man doubts was universally taught and accepted wherever undisputed Christian and profane documents record the universal sentiment of the growing Church. None but the most superficial and conceited would deny that this was believed from the moment when Christianity began to move after the death of its Leader. The ablest and sturdiest of modern opponents of supernatural Christianity, F. C. Baur, says most explicitly,* "While the historical criticism has nothing to do with the inquiry what the resurrection was in fact, it must hold fast to the assertion, that, in the

* Geschichte d. christl. Kir. I. Abschn. p. 42.

belief of the first disciples, it had become an established and incontrovertible certainty. In this belief, Christianity had gained a firm ground for its historic development. What must be presupposed as the essential foundation of this history is not the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, but the fact that it was believed that he had risen. However we may seek to explain this faith, the resurrection of Jesus had become to the first Christians a fact of conviction, and had for them all the reality of an historical fact."

We have considered Christianity thus far as a spoken or traditional history, — as a story passed from mouth to mouth, and repeated from city to city, gaining credence, till not only Jerusalem, but many cities of the empire, were filled with the report. Taking a step forward, we speak of it as written, and observe, —

The Christian history recorded in the New Testament is a *well-attested and accredited history.* We do not assert, at present, that it is a true history: we hope to prove that it is true. All that we now claim is, that it is as well attested as most histories, and far better than very many, by all the ordinary criteria by which such histories are tried and judged. We do not say that its events are not violently improbable when looked at as simply historical, and do not require a very extraordinary amount of evidence to counterbalance and overcome this improbability. But this additional evidence required is not simply historical. Of historical evidence, we have all in quantity and in quality which could be expected. We claim for the writers only the competence and honesty of ordinary narrators, and for their recorded history only the exactness and consistency of a faith-

ful narrative. We dismiss all questions of inspiration as premature and impertinent. Of the recorded story, we assert that it is historically well attested; that its geography is accurate; its chronology is satisfactory; its descriptions of the state of society at that particular juncture of Jewish affairs — as we know it from other sources — are exceedingly truthful and graphic. Its singular record of a prophecy of Christ concerning the fate of Jerusalem fixes that discourse, whatever its import may be, as having been delivered before the event itself. The four writers agree with one another as well as, and even better than, we ought to expect. From their several narratives, we can compile as good a continuous and chronological story as we can of any other life told by as many biographers. Paul's own history, as said to have been recorded by Luke, is wonderfully attested by the personal letters which contain so much of his biography. In short, from every source of evidence that is brought within our reach, we gain all the confirming attestations which any reasonable person would ask for. Some of these sources are wanting, we know. No observers of these events, who were not believers in the claims of Christ, have recorded their version of this history, unless we except Josephus; no dwellers or procurators in the provinces reported their version, and their theory of Paul's assertions and career; no keeper of the archives at Rome, no commission of the college of augurs, or any other literary or scientific association at the capital, has given any reports which were sent up to Tiberius by Pilate, or the action of the imperial government upon the same. All such accessories are wanting, we

know. We concede that the Christian story is recorded only by Christian historians, — those who believed in its truth, and gave their explanation of its events. We are sorry that we have not the witnesses on the other side, that we might confront them with ours, and cross-examine them. But, though they are not present, we can account for their absence from the court of history. The affairs of the Jews were always ignored at the imperial city. The people were regarded by its philosophers and historians as the devotees of a baneful superstition, and as the natural enemies of human kind. Jesus, in their view, was but one more of the ever pestilent and seditious rabbis; and Christianity was one additional Jewish sect. Moreover, the story of Abraham and Moses and Joshua, the Odyssey and Iliad of this people, had, for hundreds of years, solicited the attention of Greek and Roman critics; but they had not condescended to honor it with a critical even though contemptuous judgment. Why should they send a commissioner or critic extraordinary to Syria to report on the new movement of Christ? The lyrics and prophecies of David and Isaiah had been within the reach of Greek and Roman scholars for centuries, but were practically unknown to them: why should they feel an interest in the reported discourses of Jesus and Paul?

The non-believing Jews themselves, had they left many histories of those times, would have made little or no mention of the Christian sect. Those who regarded the claims of Jesus with honest contempt would not condescend to notice the appearance of so vile a fanaticism; those who viewed them with confessed and ill-disguised apprehension would designedly

leave them unnoticed in formal history. Only one such history was written, — that by Josephus, — and this is not a history of Jewish sects or of unadjusted Messianic claims, but a laudatory argument on the past greatness of the Jewish nation, skilfully addressed to the ignorant prejudices of the Roman people. There was no place in it for any but the most casual notice of Jesus, and no call for any at all.

But, though the field for attestation is narrowed to Christian witnesses and writers, it is broader than is usually acknowledged, from the great variety of points within this field upon which a comparison can be instituted. The minuteness of statement, the artlessness of the record, and the very great number of confirming circumstances from the condition of the country and the times, are, in some sort, a compensation for the deficiency of attesting and accrediting witnesses outside the Christian society. As we shall see by and by, it befitted the genius and attitude of the truth which the history enforces that it should begin in obscurity, without the notice or support of many critics or spectators.

The Christian history, as it was natural and almost necessary that it should be, was very *early exaggerated, caricatured, and corrupted* by a great variety of weak imitations, extravagant legends, incongruous additions, and designed mutilations. The Christian history was enacted and reported at a fermenting period of the world's progress. Credulous superstition, bigoted intolerance, Oriental extravagance, and pretentious Gnosticism, were all active forces. The orthodox Jew, the ritualistic Pharisee, the cultured, or, as he would now be called, the scientific Sadducee,

and the ascetic Essene, formed as many separate schools of thought and feeling. The Platonic Alexandrianism had endeavored to reconcile and combine Plato with Moses and the prophets. The æsthetic culture of Athens and Ephesus, and the luxurious elegance of Corinth, each had its fixed types of taste and fashion. The practical, world-subduing, and world-organizing Roman, with his coarse tastes and cruel passions, presented another strong type of character. Into this seething mass of opinions, traditions, philosophies, and passions, the Christian history was thrown as a powerful and controlling force.

We do not speak of its influence on the many whom it repelled and offended: we are concerned only with its effects upon many, who, in some sort, either accepted it as true, or sought to use its name and authority as sanctions to their ill-digested philosophies or their newly-contrived theories of religion. Others, whose religion was more fervent than their morality was careful, did not scruple to invent or to dream out apocryphical gospels, to indite weak epistles, and prefix to them venerable and honored names. Others, in simple dogmatic impudence, headed so-called Christian sects, and led off parties in which every form of partisan violence and denunciation was employed. The teachings of the Old Testament, and the as yet unwritten traditions of the original witnesses, of the life of Christ, were at first mutilated, misreported, and misapplied; and the writings of the last were treated with similar unfairness. The writings of Paul, of Peter, and of Luke, give abundant indications that all these movements had fairly begun in their times. That they should not only have begun,

but have been developed in forms that were both extravagant and offensive, is no more than was natural, if we consider the times and the men with which Christianity had first to do. On the supposition that the Christian history was true, it is not strange that it gathered about itself, and in a certain sense attached to itself, a burden of heterogeneous elements which it only partially purified, and subdued to its control. It is not strange that there was much in this fermenting mass that was subdued to the purity of this new agent, and was assimilated to its substance; nor is it any the more surprising that much, very much, that was foul and earthly and passionate, clung to it as an incongruous and offensive aggregation of human corruption. When the crystalline nucleus is suddenly introduced into a liquid of manifold ingredients, there shoots out from it not only many a transparent and well-shaped gem, but there gathers about its beautiful kernel a cumbrous accumulation of half-formed, ill-shapen, earth-stained, and deformed appendages, all feeling its influence, but doing little credit to the power which has so imperfectly organized them. The Christian history, if true, ought not to be held responsible for the pious frauds or the impious caricatures which soon appeared in its train. By their number and character, they illustrate the presence and power of some great force of actual personages and events such as this history records. Their falsehood and weakness do not attach to the truth under whose grand and majestic shadow they sought for patronage and protection.

The Christian history is still believed to be a true history by the great mass of men over whom Christiani-

ty is a controlling power. The majority of those who call themselves Christian worshippers, every time they assemble renew the profession of their faith in the leading facts which this history records. They listen, perhaps, to some extract from the narrative whose interest never tires. Every first day of the week is but a renewed proclamation of Easter, — that Christ did, in fact, rise from the dead. Every Christian prayer and song repeats this faith. Every child in a Christian household is first bewildered, and then elevated and entranced, by the sweet story of the Lord Christ, who was obedient to his parents, and dwelt in Nazareth, and, at twelve years old, was left alone in Jerusalem. Old age, when it tires of every thing else, and has had enough of this life, is never tired of the story that records the words that were spoken by Jesus. The land where this history was enacted is clothed by the imagination with singular attractions, because the Christian history is believed to be true. There are, indeed, a few exceptions to this assertion. There is, here and there, one who denies the history to be true, and yet claims to derive from it a more subtle essence and a more quickening energy than those who believe in its literal reality. The history is, to such, a husk, which they regard as of little value if they seize and prize the kernel. It is a beautiful parable, of which the moral alone is the jewel. Of such it is no less than charitable to affirm, that perhaps they know not whether they have finally and forever pronounced the story to be false: and it were no more than just to say, that the religious truth and moral life which they value as the only permanent truth of Christianity may be sustained for

them indirectly through the faith of the multitudes who still believe the story to be true; from whose faith in the risen Jesus they draw the life and love, the self-denial and the self-sacrifice, the patience and hope, which stimulate and sustain their own abstract and intellectual ethics, — their so-called Christian but Christless creed. Every man who lives in Christendom cannot but live in a temple where the history of Christ and the Christ of history are felt in ten thousand influences. He may turn his back upon the altar and its glorious rites; but he cannot escape the penetrating illumination that streams into every corner. The earth to him is far more green and beautiful, the heavens are more benign, the spring more full of hope, the summer more joyful, the autumn more sage, the winter more serene, man is more interesting, life is more sacred, death is more significant, the universe is more full of moral import, because Christ is believed to have visited the earth, and to have dwelt among men, and to have gone before to prepare a place for them in better dwellings. The thoughtful and refined who exclude Christ from history, and make him only a symbol, cannot, if they would, escape the influences with which the past and present faith of others in this history pervade and penetrate every fibre of their being.

It is questionable whether, if the Christian history were to cease to be believed, *the peculiar power of Christianity would not cease from the earth.* If the actual power of Christianity has, up to this time, been derived from a belief in this history as true, and if it is still thus sustained, the inference would seem to be legitimate, that, if this belief were withdrawn, the

power of Christianity would be greatly weakened or wholly destroyed. The inference is purely historical: it is founded on observation of the working of forces which have been seen to exist, and to be followed by certain results. Those who insist upon reasoning by induction, and who would confine themselves to the lessons taught by observed facts, cannot escape this conclusion.

A careful observation of facts compels the conclusion, that a hearty faith in the truth of the Christian history is attended with obedience to Christian principles and the exercise of those spiritual and ethical virtues which are distinctively Christian. Observation and history also compel the inference, that, if this faith should be weakened, the force would be withdrawn which has sustained the Christian life. The inference cannot be set aside by the reasoner who confines himself to history. He who claims that belief in the Christian history may be transient, while Christianity itself is permanent, must draw his proof from other than historic sources, — from the nature of Christianity as a system of truth. He must carry the discussion into a higher sphere. Into this sphere we are now prepared to enter.

2. We will next consider Christianity as truth or doctrine. Christianity is more than a history: it is also a system of truths. It enforces truth which might have been known without its aid, and it discovers truth which could not have been known without its communication. In both these relations, it has been most efficient. In both, its agency has been indispensable.

The distinction has been made between the facts

of Christianity and the truths of Christianity. We have ourselves observed this distinction in treating it, first as a history, and next as a doctrine. But, viewed more closely, its facts are doctrines. Every event which its history records either is a truth, or suggests a truth, or expresses a truth, which man needs to assent to or to put into practice. The appearance in history of such a person as Christ enforces the truth that God is love, and that he *so* loved the world. The healing of the sick by him is a proclamation of the divine sympathy; the raising the dead, an assertion and an enforcement of a God mightier than Nature, though Nature is bound fast in the laws which no one save He that is mightier than herself can unloose. His own rising from the dead declares that he has the prerogative to take again the life which he relinquished. His ascension is an assertion of his power and right to rule; and the presence of the Parakletos is the pledge that he cannot forget the earth which he once blessed with his presence, and the faithful men who trusted his word.

Christianity is also a doctrine in so far as Christ was a teacher. His followers were called disciples. He was continually plying them with parables and lessons concerning his new kingdom. When he sent them forth into the earth to tell the story of his life, that story included the many things which he had commanded them to be and to do. "To this end was I born," he affirms, "and for this end came I forth, that I might bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." He also claimed for himself a certain place in their faith and love; and here was a truth to be assented to. He called

himself, familiarly, the Son of man. He aspired without hesitation to the appellation of the Son of God. He called himself the Light of the world, the Bread of life, the Christ whom God had sent. Near the close of his life, he startled his disciples with the assertion, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Wherever we begin, — with the person of Christ, the work of Christ, or the promises of Christ, — we find some truth suggested, confirmed, or enforced. If we begin with his person, we are led into authorized inferences or unauthorized speculations concerning God, and Christ's relation to God before, during, and after his appearance upon the earth. If we consider his work, — whether in his life or death, or both, — we are beset by inquiries, which we are forced to attempt to answer, concerning man's need; and these open the Christian truth concerning sin, and man's deliverance; and this unfolds to us the truth concerning redemption. If we reflect on the promises of Christ, the doctrines of the purifying spirit, of perfected holiness, and of eternal life, claim our attention.

The truths that of themselves leap out of the Christian history must necessarily lead to thoughtful inquiry for comparison, adjustment, and method. The believing disciples, who received these truths with the history, would, of necessity, reflect on their mutual relations; would seek to define these relations with exactness and care, and to arrange the results in a coherent and consistent system. As a consequence and result of these efforts, there came into being, first, a brief symbol, or creed, the shortest and simplest of which must do something more than recite the leading

facts of the history, and add some small admixture of doctrine. Next followed the catechism, in which the simplest propositions of what should be believed were prepared for the use of children and catechumens. Then proceeded more or less elaborate systems of doctrine, in which the attempt was made carefully to define the truths of the creed, to reconcile them with one another and with the accepted knowledge of the times. Oftentimes this was done with an imperfect or a false philosophy, after an irrational method, and by proofs that were extracted out of the Scriptures by capricious, violent, and utterly illogical methods of interpretation. In this way, and by such a process, there grew out of Christianity as truth what is called Christian theology, which is a legitimate and necessary development of this truth after the methods of human science.

In this theology there has been much inexactness, many over-statements, an abundance of fanciful reasoning and imaginative deductions, arising out of the ignorance and error of the men who framed its several systems. Attack and defence have led to controversy; controversy, to bitterness of feeling; and uncharitable denunciation, to sectarian divisions and partisan bigotry. The presumptuous effort to frame an extended scientific statement of Christian truth which would be good for all generations, and could be enforced in every particular upon large classes of believers till the end of time, has led to innumerable evils, upon which Christianity itself has at times almost foundered, and in the re-action against which the sacredness and importance of any truth and of any fixed belief have been almost abandoned. The

scientific interest in theology has often overborne and displaced the practical. The catechism and the doctrinal system, some single phrase or often-repeated term out of which the meaning had died, has been exalted in place of the personal Redeemer; has become an idol for superstitious worship, or a war-cry for the bitterest and the meanest of personal and sectarian hostilities. The ambassador between God and man, who was sent to reconcile man to life and to God, has spent all his life in expounding the scientific relations of certain disputed points in theology. As a consequence, the way of life has not only been narrow as at the first, but it has been drawn out into a maze of entangling paths, each beset with sharp thorns: even the clew that should conduct through the maze has been as abstract and intricate as a knot of mathematical formulæ. As a consequence of these perversions and excesses, Christian theology has often fallen into disrepute and dishonor. It has even been boldly questioned, and by Christian philosophers, whether a human science of divine and infinite truth were possible; whether the attempt to reduce to finite statements what is known or knowable of Christian truth were not of itself certain to fail. However this may be, the attempt to do this is legitimate and necessary. Every generation renews it, and every society of Christian believers accepts some of its results.

Notwithstanding all these excesses and mistakes, Christianity is a series of truths upon which its power and dignity depend,— truths which it implies, enforces, or reveals. It implies the being and holiness of a personal God; it manifests and impresses him as a forgiving Father, who sympathizes with and seeks

to reclaim his wandering children; it implies and enforces the fact and the evil of personal guilt, which, if persisted in, must separate the guilty creature from the equitable and guiltless Creator; it manifests Christ as the Saviour from sin with all its evils. Among these evils, none is more prominent than its self-propagating and progressive power, involving discouragement and despair. Against this it provides the promised aid and help of a divine agency that encourages and assists the human spirit to confidence and victory. It enforces and reveals all these truths by the constant manifestation of the supernatural as an agency above the laws and above the forces of mere Nature, but which neither disturbs nor interrupts the harmony or order of a universe in which a personal God and impersonal law can never be in conflict.

3. Christianity is a life. Its history is not enacted as a mysterious or attractive spectacle; its truth is not enforced in order to satisfy human curiosity, or to enlarge human knowledge in respect to the infinite and the unseen: but both history and truth look forward to the life which they will awaken and perfect in the soul of man and in every human relation. Christianity is not a story to be gazed at and admired; it is not a scene to gratify the æsthetic sentiments, nor a fable to furnish unmatched themes for art: but it is a history to enforce or reveal important truth. This truth is not made known to further the ends of science, or to meet the intellectual longings of the soul as it looks over into the abyss of the Infinite; but Christianity, both as history and doctrine, is given to mould the character and to serve the ends of life. "I am come

that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "Many other signs did Jesus; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name." Christianity requires that its history be believed as true. Its message to the world is, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent." "He that believeth shall be saved." But it is not satisfied with the most undoubting conviction that the history is true, and the boldest defence and confession of one's faith before infidel or Jew: it requires, also, that the truths which it declares shall be believed. But it is not satisfied with the exactest and the most comprehensive orthodoxy of creed, which goes no further. A correct theology considered by itself, and as a mere science, is no more acceptable than a correct theory of the heavens. Both history and theology are only valuable when applied to their use, and made to elevate and transform the life.

The example of Christ is given to be our pattern and inspiration. "To this end are ye called, that ye should follow his steps." "The disciple is not above his Master." His work was designed to give that pardon and peace to the guilty which are life within the ribs of death; to add help and courage, which are life begun a second time in hope. His promises assure his followers of a life to come which is worthy to be called eternal. Every believing man who has commenced the Christian life says, "This is life indeed: I have never truly lived before." Whoever he may be, whether his life in Christ is gently interfused and developed with the dawning of childhood, or whether

its beginning is sharply contrasted with a godless and profane career till high noon; whether he is won by Christ's gentleness, or frightened by his rebukes, — to live to Christ and for Christ is to live indeed. The more completely and consistently a believer lives his human life as animated and controlled by Christ, the more intense and satisfactory is his life on earth; and, when he emerges beneath those portals which open the blessed land to his amazed senses, he exclaims with completed satisfaction, "This is eternal life!"

Christianity is not only life to the individual, but it gives life to human society. It refines its manners; it perfects its civilization; it renders its laws more just, and their administration more perfect; it fosters and popularizes education; it furnishes inspiration to art, and taste to its admirers. Its ethics are broad enough to meet every exigency, and minute enough to let none escape. They are progressive enough to keep pace with any advance of culture or civilization, and tolerant enough to be charitable to every offence that comes of ignorance or barbarism.

Its comprehensive, final aim is the moral and spiritual perfection of the race, and all that such perfection involves in the reformation of human society and the refinement of human culture. To this, as its sole and controlling end, its history and its truth are completely subjected; from this they derive all their importance and their interest.

Thus far have we considered these three conspicuous aspects of Christianity as actually co-existing in the same religious system.

II. We proceed to inquire how far they go to prove

that the system in which they are united is superhuman in its features, and supernatural in its origin. In doing this, we shall consider the claims of each by itself as a datum of proof; also each in concurrence with the other; and, most of all, each as supplemented by or dependent upon the other.

1. We begin with Christianity as a history. The unmatched superiority of this history is manifest, if we consider its matter. On the supposition that this story might possibly be true, it is ideally perfect, — so perfect as to strike us as superhuman. It being conceded that the incarnation and the resurrection are possible, we are ready to say at once, that the history is in every particular what we might expect or ought to require it to be. The life of Jesus, if he were the Son of God, could not have been improved, whether we regard him as Reformer, Teacher, Example, or God manifest in the flesh. In his modest reserve respecting his origin, his higher nature, his destiny, and his kingdom; in his skill and patience with his disciples; in his mingled condescension and rebuke; in his conflicts with his bigoted and sanctimonious antagonists; in his conduct at Lazarus' tomb, and towards Lazarus' sisters; in his trial before Greek and Roman rulers; in his parting scene with his panic-stricken followers; in his majestic yet agonizing submission to death; in his kingly attitude upon the cross; in his lonely resurrection; in the reserve and dignity of his subsequent intercourse with his disciples; in the walk towards Emmaus; in his half-sad, half-ironical reproof of Thomas; in his kindly thought and prayer for all believers in all future time, — there is all that we require in such a history,

if it could be conceived to be possible, and attested as true.

It is sufficiently attested, provided its matter be accepted as possible. Upon this point we have already enlarged. The considerations adverted to warrant the assertion, that, if the supernatural events recorded in this story suggested no ground of improbability, the history would stand foremost in the perfection, if not in the variety, of its attestations. That this improbability cannot be set aside by simple historical evidence, we shall show in its place. The absence of a confirmation which history cannot overcome is therefore no blemish to the perfection of the history, when it is regarded as a history.

The superhuman character of the matter of the history is, in a certain sense, rendered historically probable from the difficulty of accounting for the origination of this history unless it were true. What artist could depict the portrait of Christ if there had been no reality from which to copy? The invention of such a character — combining so many seemingly incompatible elements, and uttering seemingly inconsistent and paradoxical claims for his person and his kingdom — is itself a superhuman product which the historical critic cannot account for on purely natural principles, because, in avoiding one form of the supernatural, he must resort to another. The supernatural which he would shun on the one hand is the existence of the reality: but, in explaining this away, he supposes an hypothesis which is even more difficult to receive; i.e., he accepts a supernatural which is still more incredible, — the fact that it was invented.

We notice, also, the weaving-together of the natu-

ral and the supernatural in a union so intimate, and by arts so dexterous, that the two cannot easily be separated. The historical critic has sought again and again to eliminate the supernatural from the natural, and what he calls the probable; but he has never done it with success, so skilfully are the two intertwined. The boldest and most ingenious of such efforts have failed.

Then, again, the belief in history has wrought with mighty power upon the course of human events. If the historical critic cannot admit the miraculous into the chain of acknowledged historic causes, he is at least competent to assert two facts: first, that no other effects like those wrought by the force of the Christian story were ever wrought by any other known natural or historic causes, or any combination of such causes; and, second, that it is not easy (indeed it is impossible by any historic or natural causes) to explain how the belief in the supernatural mission and resurrection of Christ could originate, and act from the first with such potent energy.

Thus far have we considered the superhuman features of the history as history. We notice, next, its superhuman combination with doctrines, and its superhuman subservience to duty and life.

Concerning the superiority of this history as an illustration of religious truth, we need only refer to the fact, that many who reject it as a true history concede and contend that it came into being by the force of doctrine; that it was the product and growth of the absolute religion, which, in the mind of Jesus or the minds of his admiring disciples, — in either or in both, — wrought out for itself this supernatural his-

tory as a perfect allegory, a romantic dream symbolizing truth, a myth, or a legend; and then accepted or proclaimed it as true because it was so appropriate as a symbol. Of the life of Jesus, it is universally conceded that the proverb is eminently appropriate, "If the story is not true, it is well invented."

Others express it thus: The story is the unconscious product of the spirit of humanity shaping to itself a symbol for the expression of its religious faiths and aspirations. So perfect is it for these uses, that it is conceded by all, except some exceedingly audacious aspirant for the extremest opinions, that this history is not likely soon to be superseded by another. It is usually declared, that religion and art will, for a long time to come, find in the personage and events of this marvellous symbolic story all that either may require, either to impress or express the truths, the faiths, or the ideals which either may attain or develop.

As a means of ethical enforcement and inspiration, this history is equally extraordinary. No examples of human duty and perfection have ever yet been furnished which are at once so instructive and so moving as those which this history records. No stories of human duty and self-sacrifice are more instructive and more animating than the stories which Christ taught in parable and precept, and himself enacted in his life. The parables of the Good Samaritan, of the unjust steward, of the wise and foolish virgins, of the woman that was a sinner, of the unforgiving creditor; the Sermon on the Mount; above all, the Christ who healed the sick, and who counselled and spake forgiveness; who pleased not himself; who went about doing good; who loved his own to the

end; who prayed at Gethsemane; who meekly endured Caiaphas and the frantic Sanhedrim; who did not smite the treacherous Judas; who looked so lovingly upon the faithless Peter; who prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them," and commended his mother to the beloved disciple, — are all teachings and enforcements of duty which neither history nor fable in the literature of the world has as yet surpassed, and which are more effective than any and all other precepts and motives which the world as yet has witnessed or produced.

2. We take up, next, Christianity as truth. What are its chief or essential truths we shall not stay to inquire. For our argument, it would be sufficient to assert that it both teaches and enforces the personality of God, the responsibility of man, and the certainty and importance of a future life. We believe that it also teaches more than this, making prominent the guilt and helplessness of man, and the need and the provision of Christ as a Redeemer; and that from these truths, and what they involve, are derived the most convincing arguments for its superhuman origin. Our argument has full force, however, for those who assume that it teaches less.

What we chiefly insist on is, not that the knowledge or the communication of these truths is superhuman; but the fact that Christianity teaches such truths solely by means of history, and solely for an ethical end, evinces a supernatural skill and superhuman wisdom.

These truths are not taught as a science either in form or method. There are no scholastic propositions, and few logical arguments, in the teachings of Chris-

tianity. There is little abstract language, and few precise definitions. The teachings are usually simple and comprehensive utterances; and the arguments, with few exceptions, are level to the common understanding. Many of the declarations are couched in bold and striking figures. Not a few of the truths are stated and brought home by simple parables. Many are declared in a language that is more striking even than parable or metaphor, and enforced by considerations which no eloquence of speech could urge, — the language of deeds that convince and arouse, the argument of facts that impress and win. The pitying and rebuking Saviour, the raised Lazarus, the crucified and risen Christ, express and enforce truths as no teacher in any other school has ever expressed and enforced them.

And yet, in the truths that Christ uttered and enacted, there are the materials for extensive systems of scientific thought. Most of these truths are capable of taking a place in the most intricate and profound of sciences. Now, what is remarkable in Christianity is, that these germinant and productive scientific truths are not given at all in any scientific form, but are either stated in simple and popular diction, or are left to be inferred from the tremendous facts which suggest them. In other words, what is most extraordinary in Christianity, what is itself superhuman, and well might prove the system to be divine, is not so much the doctrines that it makes known, as the fact that these doctrines are taught by history.

In this is made conspicuous an adaptation to the wants of all men, in all conditions of existence, such as none but a divine forecast could have provided.

Scarce a human being is so simple, scarce a generation is so uncultured, to whom some fact of this history may not suggest and enforce its leading truths. No individual, and no generation, has as yet been so cultured, that these truths have not served as problems and suggesters of whole systems of philosophic inquiry.

But it is not intimated that such results are possible. The truths are taught and enacted for practical effect alone. If God is revealed as a Spirit, it is that we may worship him in spirit and in truth; not that the speculations of mere curiosity respecting the possibility of an Infinite Spirit, and of his relations to the finite, may be excited or put to rest. If men are convinced of guilt and danger, it is not that they may speculate about either, but that they may repent, and be reformed. If Christ is set forth to them as a Deliverer, it is not that they may perfect a science respecting his person or his work, but that they may believe and obey him.

Again: the truths which Christianity reiterates and enforces vindicate and justify the supernatural element in its history. They are its only possible vindication. Separate from these truths, this part of the story is so highly improbable, as, for all practical purposes, to be viewed as incredible; but connected with such truths, and judged by the importance and necessity that these truths should be revealed and impressed, the supernatural, in the form and manner in which it is made known, becomes not only credible, but probable. Being thus established, when it forms a part of a history that is otherwise well attested, it not only removes all objections to the reception of

the history, but it strengthens it as a history. When, in addition, the presence of the supernatural, thus accredited as true history, furnishes the only satisfactory explanation of events which are known to be historically true, — events the most extraordinary, wide-reaching, and long-enduring of any known to history, — events which are confessedly difficult to be explained by any known historic force, — the supernatural borrows confirmation from, as well as furnishes the explanation to, the whole course of modern civilization and the history of Christendom and the Christian Church. To faith in miracle, doctrines and history must combine. In Christianity, doctrine and history do combine, so as to compel the belief that the Christian miracles are possible and real.

Christianity assumes and affirms as truth a personal God, who is above the Nature which he creates and animates, and with respect to which he is himself supernatural. He that believes in such a God must believe that a miracle is possible, even in the extremest form in which it may appear, — the form of original creation. Christianity, moreover, assumes and declares that the moral necessities of men are such as to justify the use of miraculous agency. These necessities are various. The human race need to be impressed with the reality of God's being and agency. They need to be assured of the reality and earnestness of his moral rule as well as of his readiness to forgive and to purify. They need to be confronted with one of their kind who has died and lived again. They require that all these truths should be enforced to their wonder as facts of startling energy, and should be warmed for their hearts by the glow of divine

affection. These necessities are justifying reasons for the use of supernatural energy. Our faith in the breach of Nature's laws on extraordinary occasions, for a sufficient end, is, in principle, identical with our faith in the uniform and inflexible observance of these laws on occasions that are common. In the same faith, we require that miracles should not often be repeated; that, having fulfilled their design in introducing new facts and new truths and a new force into human history, it is neither to be expected nor desired that they should be either cheap, commonplace, or contemptible.

Christianity, then, as truth, proves Christianity to be superhuman: first, because the truths themselves are, some of them, such as man could not, and others of them are such as he would not, attain of himself; secondly, because the most important and peculiar of them, though wide-reaching and general, and capable of being expanded into a science that is profound and recondite, are presented to the race, not as doctrines, but as facts, — not in the forms of science, but simply as history; and, last of all, because they are such in their nature and adaptations as to justify the acceptance of a supernatural history itself as probable and true, which would otherwise be improbable and incredible. Thus Christianity as history declares and enforces Christianity as doctrine; and Christianity as doctrine makes credible Christianity as a history. Thus whatever independent and separate claims Christianity may assert as a history are made doubly strong by the separate claims of Christianity as doctrine. The union of the two more than doubles the strength of either: the mutual dependence of the two gives to their union an organic power.

3. We pass next to Christianity as a life. This concerns three particulars, — the aim or ideal of life, the rules for attaining this ideal, and the inspiration which impels to its realization. Here we notice that the ideal of a perfect human life and a perfect human being, proposed by Christianity, is more comprehensive, more elevated, and more symmetrical, than any that was distinctly conceived by man before. It is an ideal which it has not been easy to appreciate and reach since it was taught and exemplified by Christ himself. The ancients thought very earnestly, and, in a sense, very honestly, upon this ideal. They sought to know what was involved in the conception of a perfect human being. But their wisest sages reached nothing higher than the general and rather abstract result, that it involved a life according to the nature of man, or according to the wisdom of the gods. What such a life purported they did not so clearly discern. They taught, indeed, that, for the man himself, it involved self-control first and chiefest of all, in order that neither the appetites nor the passions should disturb the inward serenity of the well-poised man. Next, so far as others were concerned, it required justice; principally that the social harmony might not be disturbed; that the organized state, the outward symbol and enlargement of the individual man, might always retain its well-balanced equilibrium. The Stoics, at the latest period of their development, looked beyond the state, and had some dawning sense, in the abstract, of a fellow-man as an equal, and of the state as a more limited reflex of the greater commonwealth of the human race. But no ancient school, nor all the ancient

schools united, had reached the conception of that self-sacrificing love which is the crowning and comprehensive grace of Christ's perfect man, and of the easy subjection of the passions and appetites to the controlling spirit of this love. The grateful and loving charity which Christ proposed, and which Paul enjoined, had no place in the world's ideals of perfection, except in the Jewish and Christian schools; and it was only in the latter that it was consistently developed and adequately conceived.

If the ancient systems failed in their general conception of human perfection, much more did they fail in the special directions which they laid down for its realization. The particular virtues which Christianity recognizes so positively and uncompromisingly — as humility, patience, modesty, tolerance, sympathy, forgiveness of injury, kindness to those who persecute and insult us, and even prayer for them — were scarcely conceived of as virtues by the most advanced of the ancients; or, if some one or two were conceived of as good, it was rather as signs of a serene and self-poised nature than as the varied manifestations of divine charity. The self-sufficing happiness that is connected by Christ with losing the life for the good of others was not so much as dreamed of till Christ proposed it as the reward of all his disciples, and sanctioned and hallowed it by his life and his death.

If we look at ethics as a science, or a well-grounded and comprehensive system of special duties, we find that neither in the profoundness nor the reach of their principles do any or all of the best of the pagan systems approach in point of excellence to the system that may be derived from the apparently

disjoined teachings of the New Testament. Neither the "Nicomachean Ethics" of Aristotle nor the "De Officiis" of Cicero present so many profound, scientific principles which provide for so many particular duties, or admit of such wide and varied applications, as the unstudied and unarranged sayings of Christ and Paul. The comprehension of all human duties under two rules — each a different application of love — is an example of generalization, which, in matter and form, is beyond any attainment of the ancient ethics. Indeed, as we have already said, the duty of love to man as man was never enforced as a supreme and universal duty, — much less was it accepted as a scientific axiom. The requirement that this love should control the inner man, and become the spring of all the special affections, and the application of it to the most trying of duties, at any cost, was so original as to incur the astonished derision of the schools. The duty of toleration for differences of moral judgments in respect to external action was not so much as dreamed of, either for its practical wisdom or for its scientific value.

The sentences of Epictetus and the meditations of Antoninus, in their practical spirit, are stiff, constrained, and selfish, when contrasted with the easy, gentle, plastic, and loving temper that enlivens and warms the practical philosophy of the Gospels and Epistles.

Whence came this system of ethics, unsurpassed for philosophical and practical excellence, which is yet without philosophical form, which has never yet been outgrown, which seems so simple and obvious, but

which has proved so hard to comprehend, and so much harder to apply? If it did not claim to be from God, if the Great Teacher had asserted for himself claims no higher than were reported of Socrates or Numa, we should not find it so very irrational to say, that, in some sense, he was superhuman in his knowledge of human duty, simply because his intuitions upon the subject allow no comparison in their number, their reach, and their consistency, with those which have been attained by any other human being. But, when he himself claims a superhuman position and authority, how shall we treat this direct and positive claim, which had almost been suggested of itself, had it not been asserted by him? Shall we believe it the less because it is self-asserted? or shall we deny that he knows what he would say of himself, when he asserts truths so many and so profound concerning human duty and the supreme good? Shall we say that he is false in what he says of himself? How can we, when he points to his teachings, and declares with such serene and quiet confidence, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," and adds, "I know whence I came, and whither I go;" "Though I bear witness of myself, my witness is true"?

But we do not rest our argument here. We seek to show that the Christian ethics prove the superhuman origin of Christianity, not alone by their intrinsic superiority as a system of ethics, but from their relation to the Christian doctrine and the Christian history. It is because these unmatched ethics are also enforced by the Christian doctrines, and vitalized by the Christian history, that their superiority is mani-

festly supernatural and divine. The duties which Christianity teaches are all directly enjoined by its truths. Every truth which Christianity declares is also a motive to the performance of some duty. What God is, and what God wills; what God is now doing, and what he will do in the future state of being; what man is in his needs and guilt, and what God has done, and how he feels in respect to his help and his pardon, — are every one of them powerful reasons why man should seek after ethical perfection. "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is the comprehensive application of its whole moral code. "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good." "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." "Ye are all the children of light: therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." There is not a single truth which Christianity reveals which is not also a motive to Christian duty. The Christian ethics, thus re-enforced, are not only a system of rules: they are also an aggregate of motives. Christianity does not simply give wise and ample directions of what we are to do; but it furnishes us the moving power. It does not merely command and forbid; but it

enkindles inspiration. Hence is it that Christianity is a life. It is because the Christian ethics are religious and spiritual that they outshine every other. The ancient systems had no such excellence as this. It was only in the most general way that the theology of the ancients aided its morality. While there was, doubtless, an undefined faith that the heavens and the gods were on the side of the right, this general faith was contradicted and weakened by most of the details which the prevailing theology taught of the character and administration of the gods; and thus religion was not only dissevered from morality, but was often its deadliest enemy. What is sometimes loosely urged against the Christian ethics, that they are also religious, is their completing excellence. They not only carefully enjoin duties to God, and make them spiritual, but they derive the motive to all duties whatever from what we know of God. The ancient ethics, whether Platonic or Stoic, derived the matter and the authority of their precepts from the nature of man as fulfilling the designs, and as thus honoring the wisdom, of the higher powers. They never invested virtue with the interest which it has when regarded as the rendering of a grateful service to the loving Father in heaven, as a voluntary imitation of the divine perfections, as a cheerful and confiding submission to the divine appointments, as an honest and steady obedience to God's expressed will, or as a life of tender devotion to the redeeming Saviour. The Christian ethics do all this, and even more.

As Christian truth gives its morality enforcement and inspiration, Christian history gives it vitality. We not only receive the precepts of our Teacher, but

we read his life as our example. He not only instructs us as to what we should be and do by precepts and words, but he exemplifies it by what he himself was and did. Christ not only declares what it is to be a perfect man, but he was himself a perfect man, and, in being such, made his precepts concrete and intelligible by acting them out, as well as warm and winning by showing himself the friend of those whom he would guide. The Great Teacher in the Christian school is himself all that he tells his pupils that they ought to be. He never says "Go," but always "Come." Nay, he does not so much say "Come" as himself performs that which he desires we should imitate: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." "If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. The servant is not greater than his lord."

What power was there in the Christian history to excite to Christian virtue, as its passages of the self-denying tenderness of the Master were recalled after his crucifixion, and interpreted by the radiance that streamed from the throne to which he had so recently risen! No sane man can doubt, no historic critic dares or wishes to deny, that nothing less than such a faith in Christ as once perfect as a man, and now exalted to be Lord, could have quenched the lusts, and scorched the pride, and shamed the selfishness, and consumed the barriers of fashion, law, and religion, within which all these had intrenched themselves. If this history were a fiction, the world has still need of the same falsehood; and to have dreamed or invented this falsehood to do the work of truth argues a wit more than human with a simplicity that is

less than idiotic. What power might there not be in this same history, for all time, if it were always read with a simple and fervent belief in its truth! The Christian life, if acted out at present with the fervor and the loving spirit to which the Christian doctrine and the Christian history both inspire, would be itself an argument for the divine origin of the Christian system, which would dispense with every other.

Regarded in theory only, the fact that the life which Christianity teaches and inspires is enforced by all its truths, and is also re-enforced by its matchless history, increases immensely the improbability that it should be of human origin; and increases the probability, in the same proportion, that it is supernatural and divine.

Here we end our argument. We restate it thus: Christianity claims to be a supernatural product; and it enforces its claim by its superhuman excellence as a history, a doctrine, and a life. Each one of these features, considered alone, substantiates this claim; the union of these three features in the same system makes the argument stronger; the inter-dependence of the three, each giving and receiving strength from the other, unites them in an organic union, which makes the argument invincible and complete. It is indeed a threefold cord, which is not quickly broken.

III. This conclusion is confirmed by a review of the attempts which are made by the rejecters of supernatural Christianity to dispose of each of these heads of proof.

1. Not a few of those who reject Christianity as a history do it by first rejecting Christianity as a system

of truth. But, in rejecting Christianity as a doctrine, they are unable to explain it as a history. The argument against the supernatural in the history often takes one of the following forms: A miracle is impossible because the laws of Nature are inviolable: therefore no record of history, however amply fortified and attested, can be believed, if it declares that a miracle has in fact been wrought. This position is taken by the Pantheists of every school and shade of opinion, whether of the gross or literal school, who make the Deity, or the Absolute, one with the essence or the forces of the universe, or the more refined logico-metaphysical type, who exalt law as higher than God, and practically subject him to fate. The second form is that assumed by those who so far deny or weaken the truths of Christianity as to bring them within the easy and practical reach of mankind without the enforcement of miracles or the agency of the supernatural Christ. These last admit that miracles are theoretically possible; but they deny any sufficient occasion for their occurrence. They "cannot believe such facts on such evidence," because, in their view, there is no sufficient reason, in the truths that are made known, or in the necessities of those to whom they are taught, to justify so remarkable a deviation from the fixed and eternal laws of the universe.

On either supposition, the history is rejected for doctrinal or scientific reasons; and it is very properly rejected if either of these reasons holds good. If a miracle is impossible in the nature of things, or if there is not a sufficient reason why a miracle should be wrought, every narrative which records a miracle is incredible. We do not object to the inference, nor

to its application to the Christian history, if its premises are true: we only call attention to the arguments on which this history is questioned or denied.

The conclusion to which a process of reasoning conducts may often lead a man to question the correctness of some one or more of the premises. A conclusion which it is very difficult to explain on any other than one supposition may well make us pause before we accept it in the form of a logical inference from some assumed datum. The rejecter of the supernatural Christian history is not released from all further responsibility because he chooses to assert that a miracle is impossible, or that the alleged occasion does not justify its employment. The Christian history exists, and is well attested as a history. How came it into being if its matter is not true? How came it to be believed by so many intelligent and honest men, and with such force and energy of faith as to gain large accessions, at a rapid rate, against such fearful odds of opposition, and at such costly sacrifices? Did Christ believe that he was the Messias, the Teacher of the ages, the future Master of human thought, the perpetual Ruler of human opinion, the Judge coming in the clouds of heaven, the King of a spiritual kingdom which was to begin like leaven, and to extend, like leaven, to the end of time? If he did not believe these claims, how came any one to believe them, and especially to put them into his mouth, and to connect them with a character, which, whether a fact or a fancy, was so truthful and perfect as his? Did Christ rise from the dead? If not, how came the disciples to believe that he did, and so early, and with such assured confidence as not

to be able to refrain from asserting it? Or, to sum up all in one, how came the Christian history to be first reported, and then to be written, if it were wholly or partially false? These are questions which no man can avoid the responsibility of attempting to answer by simply asserting that his philosophy forbids him to believe that the miraculous is possible, or, in this particular case, was required. They are questions which it is very difficult to answer on the theory that denies or dispenses with the supernatural. Strauss labored earnestly and long to construct and defend a plausible theory of the origin of this history from his doctrinal basis. Baur labored with greater learning to defend another. Renan has tried another, very unlike that of either. Schenkel has essayed another. But this history still lifts up its calm and quiet voice, and points to the position which its facts took so early, and the force which they have exerted so long, as forces and effects which are hard to be accounted for without the supernatural. The affluent imagination of a quick-minded thinker may suggest a theory which will satisfy a hasty inspection of the facts. An abundant reader of the histories of religion will find no difficulty in suggesting a few parallels to the character and claims of Jesus, as in Socrates and other ethical and religious geniuses around whose names and doctrines has been gathered an extraordinary splendor; but the difficulty is obstinate, that the parallels do not readily strike cool and honest heads, and somehow do not satisfy and hold the mind. The cases are so unlike, that the sober judgment of discerning men is more offended by the audacity of the attempt to group under a single class, or refer to a common cause, objects

and effects so unlike, than it is convinced by the alleged points of resemblance, however eloquently they are expressed, or splendidly they are embellished. The points of resemblance are made the most of; the points of difference in kind and degree are quietly omitted; or the attention is withdrawn by a purple haze of epithets that hinders sharp discrimination, or by a cool effrontery of assertion that for a moment paralyzes, because it shocks the understanding. The skilled rhetorician, and the admired leader of an admiring circle, may coolly couple Jesus with other great men, and condescendingly allow, that, bating here and there some slight foibles, Jesus does, on the whole, stand the highest of all; but all the advantages which his brilliance of diction and sagacious effrontery bring to his service do not enable him to explain who Jesus was, and how his story came to be written. The expectants of what they call original thoughts from every quarter, save one, wait from week to week for some new revelation from the oracle of their circle, if possibly something may have occurred to his brilliant originality which shall settle forever these puzzling questions; but the last weekly bulletin has not yet met the inquiry, how Jesus managed to acquire and retain so extraordinary an influence over mankind, if he were not the supernatural Christ which the history represents him to have been.

Meantime this same history is as attractive and as powerful as ever to those who read it with open mind. It even manages to hold with a strange fascination of unsolved mystery the men to whom it is an enigma, a splendid myth, a dream of elevated aspirations, or a very pardonable exaggeration. They draw near to it

again and again, still fixing upon it their bewildered gaze, ever seeking and never finding how this sole and singular phenomenon, this puzzle and problem of historic criticism, this offence to what is called culture and science, may somehow or other be satisfactorily disposed of.

Whatever else may be true of this great question, we may confidently assert that the demonstrated or assumed impossibility of the supernatural has not yet set aside the claims of the Christian history as history.

2. Others assail Christianity as truth from the side of history. They tell us that the supernatural vanishes from the page of all history when it is read by the instructed and penetrating eye of the new historical criticism. It is not requisite, they say, that we raise any questions of philosophy or theology, it is sufficient for us to read the Christian story as critics, to be forced to reject the supernatural in it. And how do they read it to such a conclusion? They read it thus: "It is universally observed, that, as men become enlightened, they dismiss all belief in the miraculous. The stories of ghosts and fairies are abandoned when the race leaves its childhood. Legends and myths are uniformly connected with great heroes, and great lawgivers, and great religious geniuses, by their admiring or reverent successors and disciples. Later generations do not honor these personages the less when they divest their memory and their names of such adventitious honors and attractions, and render them the rational homage which is due to their well-grounded claims. The analogies of history itself force us to conclude that the miraculous in the Christian history is false, and justify us in explaining this part of the

narrative by some agency of high moral and religious significance; in this case by the personal force of Christ, who was a great moral and religious power in his generation, — so great, that around him there gathered extraordinary conceptions and beliefs of his divine original and power: or perhaps they were wakened and accepted in his own fervid imagination." This is the attempted solution of the history on grounds of history alone.

Let us concede that it may be correct, if we limit our view to Christianity as history. But Christianity is more than a story of miraculous deeds: it is a system of truths relating to God and man, to holiness and sin, to moral ruin and moral recovery. Some of these truths are taught by words; others are revealed and enforced by deeds. These truths not only meet more wants, and satisfy more longings, and still more fears, and awaken more hopes, and diffuse more satisfying peace, than any other truths that ever were uttered or conceived, but they are uttered in a form so popular as would seem to be the product of consummate art, were it not the natural outgrowth of unconscious simplicity. They are so wrought into the structure of this touching history as to transfigure its narrations into a series of parables and symbols, each of which seems invented for the sole purpose of illustrating these truths. They are so enforced by the most affecting manifestations of sincerity and tenderness as to have come home to the souls of myriads of simple and unlettered human beings with constraining power. They have been the springs of the best actions, and the inspiration of the best lives, of multitudes of human beings, even when they have been encumbered with

the metaphysics of the schools, and deformed by unworthy adjuncts of superstition, and corrupted through base admixtures of human invention. Whence came this wonderful system of truths? Who contrived its well-adjusted adaptations to the human soul? How was it so dexterously wrought into the history, and expressed so perfectly, so aptly, and so powerfully, by the persons and events which it describes? Let it be granted that the miracle of deeds may be explained away from the history. How can the miracle of doctrine be explained which springs forth from every page of it; which makes "the gospel the power of God unto salvation;" and which justifies the promise, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God"? To these questions, and the problems which they suggest, historical analogies about a necessary subsidence of the faith in the miraculous with the advance of reason and science, and warnings against excess of credulity, can only avail except with minds that show the extreme of credulity in the facile acceptance of the extemporized surmises of rash critics, the brilliant parallels of daring romancers, and the cool audacities of positive dogmatists.

Christianity as a life also must be accounted for and explained, even if the history is a gross exaggeration or a falsehood. A new style of character comes into the world at the date of this history and the enforcement of these doctrines, — a type of human feeling and action which was never known before in such purity and energy; which goes from heart to heart, and city to city, like a life-giving breeze; which hallows the family, suppresses human passion, and purifies society;

which makes life sacred, and death triumphant; which introduces into all human relations principles and motives that have wrought and still work like leaven, and the power of which to work in new forms of society, and to impel to every kind and degree of human progress, shows no tokens of exhaustion or limitation. How is it that the reality and the springs of Christianity as a life are to be explained? Is it said, the great central Teacher dreamed the false history was true, and taught and acted these ingenious and powerful doctrines concerning God and man in some ecstatic maze, and inspired humanity with this new life under the excitement of a divine madness, — an inspiration which is akin to the insanity of a great genius? But this genius was a genius of religion, and this implies reverence and self-distrust; a genius in morality, and this prescribes cool and self-scrutinizing integrity, and rigorous and exact veracity.

Verily, they who believe that this doctrine was inwrought into a history which itself was never transacted in its nobler passages, but was dreamed out of common prose into such powerful poesy as to give force and energy to an ethics that has never been outgrown, are themselves mad with the intoxication of a seething brain, or ill-digested reading, or brilliant phantasy. It is not surprising that in their madness there should be so little method.

3. Others assail Christianity as a life; aiming in this way to weaken or destroy its authority as truth, and its credibility as a history. Their argument is effective if it can be made good; for if the ethical and spiritual result for which Christianity professes to have been given is not good, and wholly good, there

is no reason that God should provide it by superhuman methods, or that man should receive it as a supernatural gift. While its life may have been good for its time, and even better than any other, yet, if it is not good for all time, it must give way to that which is better. The machinery by which it was introduced must likewise have been evolved by an agency which was neither divine nor supernatural. Such is the real intent and bearing of all these attacks upon Christianity as a life.

It is difficult to comprehend them all under a brief description. They naturally group themselves under the three classes of attacks upon the Christian ideal of life, upon the Christian rules of life, and the Christian motives to life. By a few writers, all these features of the Christian ethics are assailed.

We ought for a moment to notice those philosophers who hold any so-called scientific views of the nature of the human soul, or of the sources of human knowledge, which are inconsistent with human responsibility, and consequently with any scientific doctrine of ethical or spiritual life. All materialists come under this class; so do all philosophical necessitarians; and so do those who make morality to be a mere result of the laws of association, or the factitious product of psychical development, whether by means of brain growths and molecular accretions, or under the operation of growths and conjunctions that are purely psychical. Those do the same who make moral and spiritual feeling to be dependent solely on social conditions. Mr. Huxley, Mr. John Stuart Mill, Prof. Alexander Bain, and Mr. Herbert Spencer, must of necessity reject all Christian ideals of duty and of liv-

ing, because they provide for no morality that is not factitious and conventional. They are not the scientific antagonists of the Christian morality alone, but of all high morality: their science not only excludes the authority of the Christian law of duty, but of every law of duty whatsoever, and even of the law of honor and of self-respect: it not only undermines the public faith in the Christian history and the Christian doctrine, but in the ethical authority of the civil magistrate and of a fixed public opinion. But with these indirect consequences of speculative systems we are not required at present to concern ourselves.

We have first to do with those, who, in the name of a so-called better ethics and more elevated life, depreciate or dishonor the ethics or the life which Christianity would effect as the final result of its doctrine and history. Some do this by asserting that Christianity is content with an orthodox creed, or an assent to the truth of a certain history; that it relies upon these as the arbitrary conditions or means of what it calls salvation, to the neglect or depreciation of ethical goodness. To all such representations or insinuations we reply, that those who make them have not derived their conceptions from Christ and the New Testament. Whatever may be the one-sided representations of so-called Christian teachers or Christian believers, or whatever may be the practical impressions conveyed by the abuses or corruptions of Christianity, these views of Christianity are so far from being authorized by Christ, that they are carefully disclaimed and most emphatically denounced by him as false and dangerous. We have no arguments for such as find all their objections to Christianity in

the caricatures which they draw from its fancied abuses by any influential Christian sect. Those who reject the Christian system merely from antagonism to what they call Calvinism, Evangelicalism, Methodism, Pietism, or Orthodoxy, have withdrawn themselves from the reach of the arguments derived from Christianity as taught by its Originator.

It is also objected, that the Christian ethics are one-sided, because they attach exclusive or at least an excessive importance to spiritual or religious duties, to the neglect of the duties between man and man: in other words, it is said that Christianity accepts religion, and places too little emphasis upon morality. The better system of religion which is to take its place is thus described: "There will be a new church founded on moral science, — at first cold and naked, a babe in a manger again, the algebra and mathematics of ethical law, the church of men to come, without shawms or psaltery or sackbut; but it will have heaven and earth for its beams and rafters, science for symbol and illustration; it will fast enough gather beauty, music, picture, poetry. Was never stoicism so stern and exigent as this shall be. It shall send man home to his central solitude, shame these social, supplicating manners, and make him know that much of the time he must have himself to his friend. He shall expect no co-operation, he shall walk with no companion. The nameless Thought, the nameless Power, the super-personal Heart, — he shall repose alone on that."*

The ground for this misconception is found in this,

* R. W. Emerson: Conduct of Life, vi.

that Christianity teaches that the duties from man to God are as binding and as sacred as the duties from man to man, and that it derives the most powerful motives to duty in both directions from the presence and the will of God. We grant that the ethics of Christianity are, in both of these senses, religious and spiritual. We not only concede that this is so, but we insist that this is one of their characteristic excellences, and the prime condition of their superior efficiency. But, in exalting religion, they do not depress morality between man and man in respect to its sacredness or its comparative importance. The satire and denunciations of Christ against those religionists who would dispense with morality are as discriminating and as severe as any which we find in any subsequent writer or in any modern sage.

A few attempts have been made to call in question the perfection of the example of Christian morality which is furnished in the life of Christ. We are told by Mr. F. W. Newman, that, if we would subject this life to as cool and critical a revision as that to which Mr. Grote has subjected the life of Socrates, we should discover manifold blemishes. Mr. Parker and others have ventured to suggest some signs of heat of temper and impatience. We have only to ask that those who read the life of Christ should treat him with the fairness, if they cannot with the fervor, which Mr. Grote bestows upon Socrates. Mr. Grote, usually the coolest of critics, is warmed into a mood of almost fervid admiration, notwithstanding the exceptions which he takes to the well-rounded perfection of the Athenian teacher. Let those who study Christ historically, endeavor, first of

all, to understand the circumstances in which he was placed; let them remember, also, that the descriptions and records are incomplete. By observing these rules, they will find no difficulty in rising to a higher fervor of feeling at this wonder of self-denial, love, and truth — the Christ of the evangelists — than Socrates extorted from Mr. Grote by the study of Plato and Xenophon. Suggestions like those of Mr. Newman have not been often responded to. "The greatest of all heroes," says Carlyle, "is One whom we do not name." "Let sacred silence meditate that sacred matter." Another, who is an open rejecter of Christianity, writes, "It is difficult, without exhausting superlatives even to unexpressive and wearisome satiety, to do justice to our intense love, reverence, and admiration for the character and teachings of Jesus. We regard him, not as the perfection of the intellectual or philosophic mind, but as the perfection of the spiritual character; as surpassing all men at all times in the closeness and depth of his communion with the Father. In reading his sayings, we feel that we are holding converse with the wisest, purest, noblest Being that ever clothed thought in the poor language of humanity. In studying his life, we feel that we are following the footsteps of the highest ideal yet presented to us upon earth." *

Most of the objections against the Christian ethics and the Christian life are founded upon its special rules, either as these are held to involve some defect in the ethical ideal, or the means of its realization. It is urged that many of the separate sayings of Christ

* W. R. Greg: Creed of Christendom, pp. 227, 228.

were not original, because maxims like them had been before expressed by pagan sages, or were already current among the Jewish rabbis. Thus it is contended that the Golden Rule, and some of the directions found in the Sermon on the Mount, had been uttered before; and it is likely that the counterparts of many others may have been struck out by the wise moralists of different nations. The views of such critics in respect to what constitutes originality in ethics, and of what would prove supernatural wisdom and insight, would seem to be very crude. If nothing had been known or taught before Moses or Christ upon the duties between man and man, or between man and God, there would have been nothing to which either teacher could attach his doctrines, — nothing in the form of accepted moral truth to which either could appeal. Such a supposition is preposterous; and the objector who rests his argument against the superior excellence of the Christian ethics on the imagined discovery that wise men before Christ, and in pagan schools, had taught some of the same precepts which he enforced, must themselves have either a very weak conception of the nature and authority of ethical truth, or a very low conception of the intellectual powers of the persons to whom they address their arguments. Christ did not profess that all his teachings were new in any such sense as these critics suppose. He expressly declares that the special duties which he inculcates were implied in the law given by Moses. It is rather on the number and aptness and novelty of certain comprehensive directions concerning those duties to which men were especially averse that he rests his claims to either novelty or originality. It is chiefly because

men were so strongly disinclined to see their duties in the light in which he represented them that his teachings were so original and novel. It is because he emphasized so many of these striking rules in respect to this class of duties; because he traced them up to their inner principle, and set them in contrast to the prevailing errors of the religious and moral guides of his time, and of all time except as taught by him; because he taught with authority, — that he makes good his claims to superhuman originality. More briefly stated, Christ is an original teacher of ethics, not because no other teacher has taught ethical truth as truly as he, nor because other teachers have not taught many of the same truths which he taught, but because he taught so many truths, so novel, so unexpected, and connected them by common principles which were at once profound and comprehensive, and because he effectually enforced them in the name of the perfect Father in heaven, and by the charms of his own spotless life.

It is urged, again, that Christianity does not enjoin every form and style of human excellence; that there are some classes of duties for which it does not provide, — for example, duties to the State, duties of honor, duties of courtesy and friendship, — many of which are derived from Greek and Roman, and not from Christian sources. J. S. Mill, in his "Essay on Liberty," urges, "While, in the morality of the best Pagan nations, duty to the State holds even a disproportionate place, in purely Christian ethics that grand department of duty is scarcely noticed or acknowledged. It is in the Koran, not the New Testament, that we read the maxim, 'A man who

appoints any man to an office, when there is in his dominions another man better qualified for it, sins against God and against the State.' " The objection seems simply frivolous, and unworthy of a philosopher. It assumes that the Great Teacher professed to supply the world with a complete and systematic treatise upon the several classes of duties which were required in the times when he taught, or which might become necessary in subsequent generations. Nothing would seem to have been further from his intentions than to anticipate by special maxims all the new applications which would arise by the advanced and developed political and social condition of the human family, or even of the Christian community. Christ gave a few comprehensive directions to his followers, illustrated by striking examples, — some of them paradoxical or very extreme; but both rules and examples were fitted to impress some fundamental principle, or some much-needed, because much-neglected, peculiarity of temper or act. He lived before his disciples a perfect life, — dropping from his lips countless golden sentences which were never written down, like that single one which Paul happened to think of, and Luke to record, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," — and finished this perfect life by a patient and self-sacrificing death under cruel ignominy and torture. To humanity he left the legacy of these teachings and this life; and the force of neither has yet been exhausted. The question is not, whether Christ anticipated in form every question or rule of duty which might arise, — this he could not do unless the record of his teachings was to fill countless folios of casuistic directions, — but whether, in prin-

ciple and spirit, he did not in fact meet and provide for all these questions. This question is answered by the history of ethical thought and feeling in Christendom. We fearlessly ask, Has any exigency arisen in modern life, with all its refinements and complications, to which the spirit and principles of the Christian ethics have proved to be inadequate?

It cannot be objected that human experience has wrought out many special moral rules, and opened the way for many particular directions; and that, by the moulding influence of this experience, much of our present Christian morality has been shaped and perfected. This very fact illustrates the excellence and the universality of the teachings of Christ, — that they could give ethics a new spirit and profound principles, while they should not dispense with the aid of human experience for their development and perfection. It is the glory of these ethics, and their ample vindication, that they are able to take up and assimilate all that is taught or has been learned in any other school, whether ethnic or barbarous, whether Christian or infidel; that they can give welcome and find place for all that is learned in the schools of politics, civilization, or literature, and invest it with the interest and authority of Christian duty. Moreover, we cannot rightly understand Christian ethics unless we notice that the special directions and rules which were given by Christ and the apostles, so far as these are distinguished from comprehensive and universal principles, were given for the particular occasions which called them forth, and that they can only be fairly judged by a reference to those circum-

stances and exigencies. There is more meaning and importance than is always recognized in the generally accepted principle, that the special directions of the New Testament are of universal obligation in those cases only in which the circumstances are parallel.

It is more than hinted, however, that Christianity did not squarely and bravely meet the demands of its own time; that it was timid and time-serving in respect to practices which it was bound openly to reprove and denounce; that, in respect to slaveholding particularly, it evaded its duty. We cannot enter into this much-vexed question, and must content ourselves with saying that there is no sign of moral timidity in respect to other sins, opposition to which required the extremest courage. Not a few personal and social immoralities that were equally sanctioned by custom, and enforced by fashion, and hallowed by law and religion, were denounced with unflinching courage; and, even in respect to the conduct of the master to the slave, principles were broadly and boldly announced which were destructive of all the worst abuses of slavery, and tended to its extinction. How far social and civil relations modify the duties of external conduct has always been a delicate question in the purest and most elevated ethics; and the Christian ethics, so far as they are rules of external action, have not escaped, and could not escape, the same conditions. The Christian Church and the Christian sentiment of duty and right have certainly been most efficient in pushing the law of love to all possible reforms in the social and legal relations of the race. The spirit and law is as broad and as spiritual

as it ever was. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

No spirit of reform can be more radical and thorough-going than that of Paul in the words which we shall quote, while no words are more free from the cant and vulgarity, the vitriolic uncharity, and the fierce indecency, to which radicalism often misleads: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness," i.e. of right living and doing, "which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

The discriminating boldness with which Christianity contends for the right of individual judgment in doubtful questions of external conduct, and the tolerance and charity which it exacts towards those who differ from ourselves, is marvellously original. If the recognition of this right is not supernatural in its origination, the practice of the corresponding duty has proved itself so far superhuman as not to be very general even among the best of Christians and the most sublimated of Rationalists and Radicals.

The motives employed in the Christian ethics and the Christian life have been the subject of frequent and persistent objections. From the days of the old Stoics down to those of their latest disciples of the newest modern school, the objection has been uniformly and persistently urged, that Christianity en-

courages holiness, and discourages sin, by appeals to selfish feelings and by the use of mercenary motives. The Platonic Shaftesbury, the utilitarian Mill, the categorical Kant, and the intuitional Parker, Cobbe, and Lecky, unite in this common reproach. It might suffice to say that the objection, if it holds at all, does not hold against Christianity alone, but against every description of religious motives which springs from the positive influence of a personal God.

But we may say more. Christianity does not in any sense set aside the attractions which belong to simple moral goodness, nor does it supersede the authority which is of right asserted by the conscience. These attractions it heartily recognizes; this authority it honors as supreme. It adds other motives indeed, — motives that are warm with personal sympathy, and sacred by the gratitude and loyalty that are owed to the Father of spirits and the Eternal King. These motives, in their turn, are sanctioned by the conscience, in that the Father whom we obey, and the Redeemer whom we love, are purity and goodness itself, commanding and exacting only that which is good. It should ever be remembered, that, as human, we are not self-sufficing, though we are subject to the conscience as supreme. We are made to revere, to worship, to trust, and to obey, not the "super-personal Heart," but One who is no less personal than the dependent persons who exist in his likeness. As human, we seek his sympathy; we long for his friendship; "we thirst for God, for the living God;" and for this reason we require the personal motives which glow with so intense an energy in the human Christ, the manifested Word. But we are not there-

fore selfish because we are human; we are not mercenary because we acknowledge our dependence and confess our wants. That is the selfish soul, which, in hollow self-sufficingness, disdains to own its Father in heaven. He is mercenary who takes counsel of his godless pride; who bends the knee to no god save some magnificent nebulosity which owes all its attractions to the prismatic splendors that are borrowed from the sun which it obscures, but cannot supersede. The loving and humble Socrates, human in his playful irony and gentle affections, devout toward the deity whom he honored, was not half so selfish or sordid as the self-contained and self-sufficing Stoic who succeeded him, and proclaimed the wise man to be himself a king and god. It is the glory of the Christian ethics, that, while they are most unselfish in their disinterestedness, they are also intensely human and practical in their sympathies and their adaptations. The Christian life is better than every other, — not alone because its ideal is the highest, nor because its rules for attaining it are more profound and practical, but also because its motives and inspiration are personal in their attractiveness and energy.

But we appeal from theory to fact. Whatever we may conclude in respect to the nature and rank of the Christian ethics, we cannot deny that the personages and events of Christian history have been till now the most efficient forces in the service of a pure and unselfish life which man has as yet encountered. Even at the present, the events of the Christian history are universally retained as the best examples and symbols of the highest perfection by those who reject

or half receive this history as true. It is confidently predicted, that, in the future,

> "Whatsoe'er
> The form of building, or the creed professed,
> The cross — bold type of shame to homage turned,
> Of an unfinished life that sways the world —
> Shall tower as sovereign emblem over all."

But why should the cross be destined to endure as the sole and sovereign emblem over all? It ought to have been long ago superseded, and the Martyr who hung upon it, by instances more striking and touching, if humanity has made the advances which are claimed either in its ideal or its achievements of perfection. There have been witnesses for ethical truth, by word and life, since the days of Jesus: if any have known or done better than he, they ought long ago to have taken his place as examples and symbols to the race. But that there has been or will be any symbol or enforcer of human duty and sacrifice which may supersede the Christian history, is not even claimed by those who reject this history as supernatural. They do not contemplate this to be possible. One of the sturdiest and the boldest of these rejecters disowns the very thought: "With no hostility, then, towards Christ and Christianity, may the Theist renounce his faith in miracles and prophecy. Let all benefactors of mankind continue to look on Jesus as their forerunner in this great cause, and recognize a kindred mind in the Galilean who preached lessons of wisdom and benevolence in an early age of the world, and fell a sacrifice to the noble idea of introducing a kingdom of heaven upon earth. Let the

Good Samaritan still be cited as the example of humanity, the passover-supper be remembered as the farewell of Jesus to his friends, and God be worshipped under the character which he attributed to him, — the Father in heaven. Let painting and music still find solemn themes in the realities and fables relating to Jesus; let fasts and holy-days still take their names from the events of his life, our time be dated from his birth, and our temples be surmounted by his cross." *

In like manner, it is felt and confessed that the chief truths of Christianity — those which set forth the fatherhood, the purity, and the compassion of God — have become the possession of the race, and sum up the absolute or the perfect religion; and that these were taught and enforced more thoroughly and efficiently by Jesus than by any one since his time. It is also conceded that these truths and this history, with all their abuses, are at this moment the strong if not the indispensable pillars of human morality, and even of civil order. The following, from Renan, is full of significance: "While we enjoy the liberty" [of thought and of science] "as sons of God, let us beware of contributing to that weakening of virtue which would threaten society if the force of Christianity should be enfeebled. What should we be without it? Who shall replace such schools of seriousness and reverence as the Saint Sulpice? — such a ministry of self-abnegation as that of the Sisters of Charity? How can we avoid being terrified at that aridness of emotion, and frivolity of aim, which are at present

* C. C. Hennel: Christian Theism, p. 18.

overrunning the world?" And again: "If Rationalism insists on governing the world without providing for the religious wants of man, the experience of the French Revolution interposes to warn us against the consequences of an error so fatal." *

Of the relation of this system to the heart of man, another rejecter of Christianity speaks in the following passionate language: "If any minds are drawn back" to Christianity by terror at the logical consequences of their negative position, "it is well: they are safe within their proper haven. Let them not quit the sheltering refuge meet for them; it is a home of blessed feeling, domestic to their hearts: nor let the self-exiled wanderers, either, be denied the welcome of guests, when they would fondly return to share the endeared associations of old familiar faith. Shut not up your feelings, Christians, nor your rites, against those in whose bosoms the silver cord is not yet broken which renders back the vibration of harmonic sympathy. Christianity is the true religion wherever feeling is predominant. While its tide is sweeping even occasionally over minds habitually differently constituted, no logic can prevent those which are the most convinced of its error from being Christians again." †

The proved efficiency, and the acknowledged necessity, of Christian truth and Christian history, to give effect to the Christian style of ethics and perfection, may well suggest the inquiry, whether Christianity as a life is not all that it claims to be. Any

* Les Apôtres, lxiii., lxiv.

† Sara S. Hennel: Thoughts in Aid of Faith.

inference to the contrary is shattered by the stubborn logic of the facts that have been illustrated in the history, and been accepted in the convictions, of all Christendom.

We have thus briefly touched upon most of the positions which have been taken by the modern assailants of Christianity. They have not succeeded in setting aside the force of its history, of its doctrines, or of its life, when considered independently. They have not succeeded in destroying the one by means of the other, — neither the history through the doctrines, nor the doctrines or the life through the history, nor the doctrines or the history through the life; but, on the contrary, the assailant of either by the flank has been suddenly confronted by the whole line. The hammer has not been broken by the anvil, nor the anvil by the hammer; but the hand has been paralyzed by the recoil of the stroke.

We have not considered any attempts to account for the union of these three superhuman features in one organism; for such an attempt has never in form been made. The assailants of Christianity find ample occupation in dealing with any one of its leading features. The loose theory, that this extraordinary organism of history, doctrine, and life, was the product of a myth or a conscious imposition, one or both, — or partly one, and partly the other, — does not account for the presence of these separate elements of their system, least of all for their organic union and strength. It is broken upon the fact, that the Person who could give such a system life and force was too wise to be mistaken in respect to his own nature and position. If he

were honest and earnest enough to conceive and enforce such a life, he was too honest to be false in regard to himself or his relations to God and man. That he had the insight and forecast to discern, that, by his death of self-sacrifice, he should become the central force of human history, proves that he could not be mistaken; that he was willing to make the sacrifice, proves that he could not be false.

"It would have taken a Jesus to forge a Jesus," said Mr. Parker; i.e., even the Jesus whom Mr. Parker believed in, after eliminating the supernatural from the narrative of the evangelists. By the same rule, it would have taken the Jesus which the narrative recounts to forge the conception of the supernatural Christ. That such a Jesus *would not* have forged such claims is obvious.

Our argument is susceptible of still another application; and that is from the corruptions and abuses of Christianity. We might show how sadly and offensively Christianity has been abused as a history, a doctrine, and a life; how its history has been made a spectacle and a superstition, and faith in its historical events and personages has been substituted in place of the perfected character for which alone the history was enacted; how its truths have been mutilated, exaggerated, and caricatured in creeds and catechisms, and systems of theology; and how faith in a dogma, a creed, or a metaphysical shibboleth, has been practically enforced in place of loving confidence in the personal Saviour, and humble obedience to his teachings; how Christian perfection has been caricatured by the horrible asceticisms and the scandalous libertinisms that have been inferred from

its cheerful humanity and its sensitive purity; and how, in consequence, Christianity itself has at times become an offence in the eyes of pagan, infidel, and Jew. And why did it not founder in its rottenness and incoherence? or, rather, why is it, that, of all the religions, Christianity alone has found within itself the means and the motives to its own reformation and revival? Simply, as we might show, because its history never could be so totally debased by processions, spectacles, or superstitions, as not always to suggest some wholesome truth, and some purifying and restraining duty; that its doctrines could never be so austere or so effeminate as to be incapable of some healthful manifestation of God; and its ethics, in their worst and their most licentious forms, could never wholly obscure the tender sympathy and the sober purity of the Christ of the Christian story. The action and the interaction of these three elements of the Christian system, as it might be shown, have, not unfrequently, been the salvation of the Christian cause.

But we have no space for the expansion of this part of our argument.

The argument suggests a single inference as to the practical attitude which Christianity assumes towards every human being whom it invites to faith in its truth. The end and aim of its provisions and its message are his purified and perfected moral life. This end can be effected only as he yields himself to the influences which are embodied in its doctrines and are illustrated in its history. That these truths may assist and control the man, they must be accepted by him as true; that the history may move and win

him, it must be received as a fact. For this reason, Christianity summons man to the duty of faith, because it is only by means of faith that he can receive its blessings. It is idle to speculate whether the character which it would form may not be attained by one who rejects its doctrines, and disbelieves its story. We may safely rest in the conclusion of Richard Baxter, that God will never cast off a soul that truly loveth him, while we ponder the words of the beloved disciple: "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" To those earnest and elevated souls who long to believe, if they could; who, with the New-Testament story in their hands, and the history of Christianity to expound it, do not yet know what to make of its Christ, — we doubt not that the divine Master continues to say as of old, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that asketh of thee, Give me to drink, *thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water*."